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Viewing cable 09BUENOSAIRES153, ARGENTINA: FOREIGN MINISTER PREVIEWS ARGENTINA

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#09BUENOSAIRES153.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09BUENOSAIRES153	2009-02-13 10:09	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Buenos Aires

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BUENOS AIRES 000153

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: FOREIGN MINISTER PREVIEWS ARGENTINA

EXPECTATIONS FOR PROGRESSIVE LEADERS, G-20, AND T&T SUMMITS

REF: BUENOS AIRES 142

Classified By: Ambassador Wayne for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Ambassador Wayne met with Foreign Minister Taiana and Vice Foreign Minister Taccetti to exchange views on how the USG and Argentina can work collaboratively in the coming months as President Obama's administration defines its priorities in the hemisphere. They noted that there were many opportunities in the coming months for high-level bilateral exchanges, including VFM Taccetti's upcoming trip to Washington, the Progressive Leaders' Summit in Chile, the G-20 in London, and the Summit of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago. Taiana expressed the GOA's hope that a senior-level USG official would attend the Chile summit, especially since the initiative began under former President Clinton's administration.

¶2. (C) The FM also underscored the importance of the G-20 summit in developing a multilateral approach to resolving the economic crisis and stressed the GOA's hope for a positive Summit of the Americas. Taiana was upbeat on Argentina's ability to weather the economic storm in the short term, saying the world "always underestimates Argentina." He cautioned, however, that "the world needs this fixed quickly" to avoid a deeper and longer global economic recession. Privately, Taiana said he hoped a brief meeting between the two presidents would be possible during the G-20 Summit, and expressed his strong interest in meeting with Secretary Clinton, perhaps on the margins of the April 6 Ministerial-level event on the Antarctic to which the Secretary has just invited the Minister. End Summary.

Upcoming Opportunities for Dialogue

¶3. (C) On February 12, Ambassador Wayne met with Foreign Minister Jorge Taiana to exchange views on how the USG and Argentina can work collaboratively in the coming months as President Obama's administration defines its priorities in the hemisphere. They were joined by Vice Foreign Minister Vittorio Taccetti, DCM, and Acting Polcouns (notetaker). Taiana indicated that VFM Taccetti's visit to Washington next week was an "excellent preparatory meeting" for eventual contacts between senior USG and GOA officials that would "likely happen at the G-20 Summit and the Summit of the Americas." The Ambassador agreed that this was an opportune time to visit Washington and to enhance collaboration for the two Summits.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador noted that Argentina's proposed guidelines for the VFM's meeting with WHA A/S Tom Shannon were good and proposed additional topics (pre-cleared with WHA) for discussion, including: enhancing regional security cooperation, future of the 3 1 dialogue, counternarcotics cooperation; promoting progress on renewable energy and climate change; exchanging views on Bolivia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Colombia, Cuba and Haiti; bilateral economic issues; and the future of the bilateral consultative process. Taiana stated that these suggestions were fine, and reiterated the GOA's interest in a bilateral meeting at the upcoming G-20 Summit and Summit of the Americas.

¶5. (C) Taiana then asked about the possibility of senior-level USG attendance to the upcoming Progressive Leaders Summit in Santiago, Chile. He noted that the UK's Prime Minister Gordon Brown would attend as well as Brazil's Lula and Spain's Zapatero and added that the Chile meeting is an excellent opportunity to prepare for the subsequent G-20 Summit in London. He said that he was pleased that the United States would attend again, especially since the Progressive Leaders Summit was an initiative of the former Clinton administration. The Ambassador noted that Washington has not yet made a decision on who will attend.

The Kirchners' Fascination with President Obama

¶6. (SBU) The FM confirmed the Argentine first couple's ongoing fascination with President Obama. He said that ex-President and First Gentleman Nestor Kirchner made his

remarks (reftel) to a Peronist political rally that Obama "is implementing the same policies we have been carrying out since 2003" just hours after watching televised coverage of the President's February 10 speech on the U.S. economy in Ft. Myers, Florida.

FM: We Need a Successful Summit of the Americas

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¶7. (C) Turning to the April Summit of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago, the FM stressed that it is "important that the Summit be a success." At the same time, he expressed his understanding that the GOA did not expect the USG to have a fully formulated Latin American policy ready in time for the summit. GOA officials did, however, hope for some early indications of the new direction that President Obama will give to U.S. policy. Referring to the 2005 Summit of the Americas hosted by Argentina, Taiana joked that Argentina has experience with "combative" summits and stressed that it was in everyone's interest that the Trinidad Summit be positive and forward-looking. (Taiana, as then-Vice Foreign Minister, had the lead in organizing the Counter-Summit of the Americas, which invited protesters to an anti-Summit rally featuring Venezuelan President Chavez as the keynote speaker.) He asserted that Bush's emphasis on free trade and security had little resonance in Latin America, particularly in Argentina since the country "did not have problems with terrorism and drugs at the time."

¶8. (SBU) VFM Taccetti added that President Obama has an opportunity to adopt a "more cooperative" approach to the Americas. He acknowledged that the USG has by far the most influence to define the regional agenda but that it was important "not to throw your weight around." Taiana added that Latin America would be more open to U.S. leadership if it worked collegially, saying "crises have a way of bringing countries together."

FM: World Must Avoid Protectionism

¶9. (C) Turning to the G-20 summit in London on April 2, Taiana opined that the focus should be on elements of common ground, which in his opinion included an aggressive to get the global economy out of a recession, the need for solidarity towards the many millions affected by the global slowdown, and what he called "the tension between saving domestic jobs and preserving international trade." He said that he understood that such tension exists in all countries -- "in times of crisis, countries take care of their own first" -- and suggested that the G-20 explicitly recognize this fact of life. At the same time, he expressed concern over the "Buy America" program and the potential for other countries to adopt a protectionist stance. He acknowledged that it would be difficult for countries to open their economies now but, noting the lessons from the Great Depression in the 1930s, insisted that protectionism would be a disastrous "political mistake."

¶10. (C) Taiana mentioned Argentina's interest at the G-20 in pursuing reform of International Financial Institutions and particularly the IMF so that they increased their emphasis on financing infrastructure projects and de-emphasized policy conditionality, as well as its support for cracking down on tax havens to reduce tax evasion and capital flight. The Ambassador noted that what was important was a constructive process in which agreement can be found. A number of countries, for example, will likely not favor the degree or type of IMF reform Argentina is seeking but we should be able to find common ground. Taiana said he agreed.

FM: Argentina Will Weather the Storm

¶11. (C) Taiana was upbeat on Argentina's prospects for weathering the current economic storm, predicting that the economy would grow in 2009 despite widespread predictions to the contrary. As always, he said, "the money stashed under mattresses and in home safes" would be Argentina's secret weapon, bolstering consumption when it seems that domestic liquidity had evaporated. The upcoming completion of several large projects, including Argentina's "Atucha 2" nuclear reactor and the expansion of the country's electricity grid, would for example bolster energy supply and thus growth.

¶12. (C) The world "always underestimates Argentina," Taiana complained good-naturedly, noting that the country for years has outperformed predictions of impending doom from the IMF and "The Economist" magazine, which he attributed to ideological hostility to Argentina's recent governments. Despite the fact that the international financial community still has not "forgiven us" for cancelling debts, Argentina has consistently outpaced expectations, growing despite its lack of access to foreign capital markets. Referring to his conversation in Madrid with Peruvian Foreign Minister Jose Antonio Garcia Belaunde earlier this week, Taiana noted that Argentina, Peru, and many other countries in the hemisphere have taken steps to ride out the crisis until the end of ¶2009. What concerns Latin governments, he said, is the

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global economic crisis's prolongation beyond the end of this year. "The world needs this fixed quickly," he said.

Bilateral Meetings

¶13. (C) On the way out, Taiana (He asked to handle this very quietly.) said we very much hoped that a bilateral meeting (even if brief) between the two presidents could be held during the G-20 Summit in London. He also said he very much hoped to have an early opportunity to talk with Secretary Clinton. In this context, he indicated that he understood there would be an event which Secretary Clinton will host April 6 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Antarctic Treaty and said that he would work to rearrange his schedule to attend in strong hope that even a short meeting with the Secretary might be possible.

Comment

¶14. (C) GOA officials, from President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner on down, are clearly ready for enhanced dialogue with the USG and hope that the three upcoming summits result in high-level bilateral meetings. The GOA shares our desire for a positive outcome at the Summit of the Americas, even if our definitions of "success" may differ. VFM Taccetti's visit to Washington -- billed locally by the GOA as a coup because it is the first policy-level discussion between State Department and Latin American officials since the inauguration -- gives us an opportunity to encourage responsible and constructive GOA behavior at both the G-20 and the Summit of the Americas.

WAYNE